

## IMPLEMENTING THE STANDARDS

The typical reaction to the Content and Performance Standards by many ensemble conductors, busy with all the performance demands of their jobs, is, "How am I supposed to do all that and maintain my program?" The question is a fair one because many feel the standards imply textbooks and a lessening of rehearsal time. However, implementing the standards does not mean trading the rehearsal chairs and music stands for desks. On the contrary, since music is music only while being performed, the procedural knowledge and understandings--how to do music--can best be learned through *doing* music: performing, creating, producing, and responding (analyzing and reflecting) to music. Music educators across the country who have begun incorporating the standards into their teaching find that, instead of being a distraction, the standards can help improve both understanding and performance. Three factors seem to typify those programs in which the standards are being successfully implemented: the activities of the present music program are maintained but are focused on the standards; instructional strategies promote high student motivation; and students take an active role in achieving the standards. This column will try to answer the questions most often asked by teachers by describing successful approaches that some have used to begin implementing the standards in their classes.

### Standards F and G (Analyzing and Evaluating)--The Enablers

Without doubt, Standards F and G are the most natural and the easiest to incorporate into the typical music program. First, because they enable students to assess and improve their own performance, they align directly with program goals. Secondly, teachers have found that when they ask (and respect and nurture) students' assessments of their performances, student ownership and motivation follow. Finally, the standards' competencies are the key to achieving the other standards that deal with procedural understandings--A through E--and are ideal for involving the students actively in their own learning instead of merely responding to the teacher's directives. By questioning, thinking deeply, making musical decisions, and trying new possibilities, the students become thoughtful critics of their own work and move toward achieving an important goal of Goals 2000--that "students learn to use their minds well." This article will consider matters such as when the standards can be introduced, how implementing these standards might look in a typical program, how they might be assessed, and the use of rubrics.

### Introducing, Programming, and Assessing F and G

Because studies have shown that 5-year-olds can make substantive self-assessments (i.e., F and G), teachers should establish reflective activities early as a habit of mind. Implementing F and G can begin in kindergarten, helping students become active learners who generate work, ideas, and ways of thinking in the process of solving problems. For instance, some teachers have kindergartners create soundscapes in small groups. The students take turns **composing** by standing in front of their group and indicating who is to **play**, when, and how loud or soft. Afterwards, the teacher asks the students if it sounded as they had planned it and what changes they would suggest. Activities like this can encourage the habit of reflective thinking--standing off from the product of one's work, viewing it objectively, and making judgments about it from a desire for mastery, not for reward or fear of stigma. This early introduction to critical analysis and assessment, if continued and guided by the teacher, can lead to well-developed discriminations in the upper grades.

In later elementary classes students can be more actively involved in the process, discussing and deciding, with the teacher, the important dimensions or criteria in the instructional task, including criteria for student self-assessment (What would a good self-assessment include?). This kind of involvement helps the students internalize and focus on the criteria, helps develop a sense of ownership, and is a strong source of motivation. Student self- and peer-assessment follows naturally from this and can begin as an oral class discussion, later as small group discussions, and even later as individual students' reactions. When the students reach a certain comfort level with this, the teacher can introduce more structured assessments such as checklists or rating scales. Eventually assessments could include

teacher/student-developed rubrics, in which the attributes of the criteria are described at various ability levels (e.g., advanced, proficient, partially proficient, and minimal). In each case, there would need to be two sets of rubrics--one on the product of the task (e.g., performance, improvisation, composition) and the other on the students' ability to analyze and assess their work and suggest improvements. And the teacher's assessment should focus on encouraging and helping the students improve both the products and their assessments.

In middle school and high school performing groups, students can write critiques of their performances, with the teacher assessing both the performances and the critiques. Some music educators in middle and high school have found it easiest to introduce this in the weekly individual or small group lessons. The students are asked to record their best efforts on an etude or solo; critique it, observing strong points and challenges; and suggest ways to improve it in future practice. (Some middle school teachers find that asking the student to attend to only two or three performance dimensions per lesson, such as tone, phrasing, dynamics, etc., helps the student focus more in-depth on those points.) The teacher then critiques the recording and the students' comments and returns both to the student for guidance in the next week's practice. Teachers report both enhanced student engagement and performance. At some point more structured assessments of both performance and student assessments, ranging from checklists to rubrics, could be developed by the teacher and students. This would help students internalize performance targets, and assessments based on the rubrics would better inform both teaching and learning.

When students achieve a degree of comfort in assessing individual performance, small or large ensemble critiques could be introduced. The teacher tapes a segment of a piece during rehearsal and asks the students to listen to it during free time and describe the strengths and problems they hear in their own performance, their section's performance, and the entire ensemble's performance, followed in each case with any suggestions for improvement. As above, the teacher comments on both the performance and the student's critique and returns it to the student. At an appropriate point in the students' development, teacher and students could develop rubrics which describe in detail what the students' assessments could be expected to cover and how well at the various ability levels. Again, assessments built on these rubrics would give clearer direction to both teacher and student.

### **What are Rubrics??!!**

This is perhaps the most puzzling to most of us. The SCASS Arts Project\*\*\* is a consortium of several states working to develop assessment tasks in all the arts, based on their respective standards. They define a rubric as a series of categorizing statements based on a task's important aspects (a.k.a. criteria, artistic dimensions) that describe the attributes of those criteria at certain levels of quality of work.

- The first step is discussing and deciding with the students the three to five most important aspects (criteria) of the task (What do you want them to achieve?).
- The second step is developing the rubric - descriptions of those criteria at different levels of ability. Guiding questions for rubric development are "Do the rubric statements describe the criteria clearly at each level? Do they enable a reliable yet adequately fine discrimination of degrees of work quality?" The SCASS Music Committee developed a performance task to assess a student's ability to perform and self-assess (Wisconsin Standards A or B, F, and G). They developed "holistic" rubrics, which describe several criteria in the same statement.

An example follows. (Note that the criteria--accurate, detailed response; references to locations in the score; use of music terminology--appear in each level.)

**Advanced:** Responds specifically, accurately, and in detail to all specified dimensions, referencing responses to locations in the score and using music terminology.

**Proficient:** Usually responds specifically, accurately, and in detail to all specified dimensions, usually referencing specific locations in the score and usually using specific musical terminology.

**Basic:** Sometimes responds specifically, accurately, and in detail to all specified dimensions, occasionally referring to specific locations in the score and sometimes using specific musical terminology.  
**Minimal:** Responds inaccurately to some of the indicated dimensions, lacks details, is vague in referring to locations in the score, and uses little or no musical terminology.

They also developed a separate rubric to assess the student's ability to suggest solutions to performance problems. There were two criteria--suggestions for revisions and linkage of the revisions to the specific problems noted by the student.

**Advanced:** Highly articulated revisions are suggested and are linked with specific critical comments (e.g., "I should practice the right hand alone so the counting is corrected in measure 3.")  
**Proficient:** Specific revisions are suggested but are not necessarily coordinated with critical comments (e.g., "I should change my fingering.")  
**Basic:** Offers broad, superficial, or non constructive musical or technical suggestions (e.g., "I should play more in tune.")  
**Minimal:** No attempt to suggest revisions or how to improve the performance (e.g., "Practice.")

The rubrics the Committee developed to assess the student performance itself (Standards A or B) were analytic rubrics, which describe each criteria (tone, note accuracy, intonation, rhythm, articulation/diction, expression) separately. This type of rubric is especially informative as students work to improve performance. An example of the Tone Quality rubric follows.

**Advanced:** Vocal tone is open and resonant; instrumental tone is a good example of characteristic tone.  
**Proficient:** Vocal tone is less open and resonant, exhibiting episodes of tension and restriction; instrumental tone varies from the characteristic sound but does not detract from the performance.  
**Basic:** Vocal tone is more closed than open and lacks resonance; instrumental tone varies from the characteristic sound to the point of detracting from the performance.  
**Minimal:** Vocal tone is generally closed and pinched; instrumental tone is consistently uncharacteristic of the instrument.

These are only meant as examples which teachers can change, adapt, or adopt as needed.

## **Projects and Processfolios**

Two educational vehicles used in the Arts PROPEL\*\* model of instruction/assessment are especially important in this approach to standards-based education. Carefully focused efforts over time will be required if students are to make substantive progress toward achieving the standards. Instead of short-term, episodic instruction, teachers have found that long-term projects focusing on the standards are ideal vehicles for helping students gain in-depth understanding. The most logical approach is that adopted by some performance conductors. They analyze and select their concert music as study material (a la CMP\*) for projects based on the standards, such as improvisation or composition, which culminate in the concert performance. Elementary general music teachers could do the same, but their projects may need to be shorter in length and perhaps more closely structured.

In all cases, having students keep all their work, from sketches to finished product, in a process-portfolio gives the student important learning experiences, such as noting progress from earlier work to the present; revisiting and improving earlier work; and planning for future efforts. Other important learning experiences possible with process-portfolios are student self-assessment over time and student/teacher evaluation. Finally, projects and process-portfolios are excellent for building student ownership and motivation.

## Recap

This column has focused on using Standards F and G as tools to achieve better performance. While we typically emphasize performance, skills of analysis and evaluation must be guided and nurtured just like performance skills, for they are the basis for achieving the other standards. And the teacher must encourage and take each response seriously if the students are to see this as an authentic task instead of a problem set made up by the teacher. These two standards can also be used to achieve the competencies of Standards C, D, and E, in which the students produce (perform, create) and respond (perceive and reflect).

Note that in each example above the teacher assesses the students' performance and their self-assessment and then returns both to the students. This "feed-back loop" embeds assessment in instruction, informing the students of their progress so both they and the teacher may direct their efforts more efficiently. This active involvement of the students in their own learning and in an authentic task (one that adult professionals do) can yield strong student motivation.

Several of the teachers in the above examples regularly use small group and peer assessment of student work in a non-threatening atmosphere. They have found that they are not only excellent learning activities (students learning from each other); they also can create a community-of-learners climate within the class, in which cooperation and collaboration dominate the usual competitive stance. Many have found that keeping a journal and occasionally reviewing it gives them important insights in motivating students to assume responsibility for their own learning.

Both students and teachers must be learners in this different way of instructing and assessing, always asking: "How should I make use of this feedback (from students, from teachers, and from students' peers)?" Teachers must find time from their too busy schedules in order to reflect regularly on how best to nurture students' habits of mind, the quality of work to expect that is appropriate to a student's development, how those qualities can be expected to change over time, the most important dimensions to stress in any task, etc.

The standards present us with a vision of a bright new world in education, one that can replace the accoutrements of the industrial model school with a wonderful ferment of new ideas and exciting possibilities. We live in interesting times!

Adapted from the April 1999 issue of the *Wisconsin School Musician* and used with permission.  
(Author Mel Pontious)

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\*CMP, Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance, is a model developed in Wisconsin in 1977 for teaching musical understandings in the performance class. For details contact WMEA, 4797 Hayes Rd., Madison, WI 53704, 608/249-4566.

\*\*Arts PROPEL is an instructional/assessment model developed by Harvard Project Zero that stresses students' active engagement in their own learning. For details contact Project Zero Publications, 124 Mt. Auburn St., 5th floor, Cambridge, MA 02138, 617/495-4342.

\*\*\*SCASS-Arts is a consortium of several states that is developing performance and selected assessment tasks in the four arts areas. For information contact Council of Chief State School Officers, One Massachusetts Ave., NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20001-1431.